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THE ANTE-PURGATORIO OF DANTE ALIGHIERI.

TRANSLATED BY

T. W. PARSONS.

ANTE-PURGATORIO

OF

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BODLEIANA · BIBLIOTHECA ·

LONDON:
HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.
1876.

285. d. 10.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY JOHN STRANGEWAYS,
Castle St. Leicester Sq.

THE first nine Cantos of the 'Purgatorio' of Dante are but preliminary to the rest; and several German critics have adopted the title of 'Ante-Purgatorio,' by which Italians have sometimes distinguished them. It is not until the opening of Canto X.,

'Là dove 'l Purgatorio ha dritto inizio,'

that we pass the threshold of the gate which leads to the several rounds of penance.

The present translator, being occupied with other portions of the 'Divine Comedy,' feels free to postpone for a time the publication of his complete version of the Purgatory, together with such notes as may have approved themselves the fruit of a long study. But as these nine Cantos have already appeared in the 'Catholic World,' and as they form one recognised division of the poem, they are now reprinted for the use of those who have desired to possess them in one collection.

'Every branch that beareth fruit
He purgeth it,
That it may bring forth more fruit.'

In perusing this version of the 'Purgatorio' of Dante, the reader may profitably direct his attention less to any dogma of the Church or any formula of a special creed, than to the allegorical sense of the poet, founded, as it must be acknowledged by all Christian believers, upon the facts of our nature and the history of the human heart. 'The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory' may be combated as an article of faith, but must be admitted as a true statement of the condition of mankind, religiously considered. The wretched state of man 'living without God in the world;' the self-conviction of sin; the necessity of a Saviour; and the possibility of attaining, through the heavy passages of contrition and the wearisome stages of penance, to the 'peace which passeth understanding,'—is the sum of the doctrines embodied in the 'Divina Commedia.'

Dante, having partly in imagination, and partly (as we may justly suppose) in reality, passed through the torments of the life of sin and passion and unbelief that make the hell of this world, has come to the *antipodes* of his poetical creation, whose way is up the toilsome hill of penance to the terrestrial paradise of pardon and peace. Still, as in the infernal realm, under the guidance of his master in song, Virgil, he is met by another pagan spirit, Cato the Suicide, of Utica, who teaches him the first lesson to be learned before the soul of man can enter into the penitential state,—and that lesson is *humility*. The 'lowly reed' wherewith Dante is instructed to gird himself (v. 90) is typical of that which He bare in His hand who wore at the same time the crown of thorns, and who said, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.'

TRANSLATION

OF THE

ANTE-PURGATORIO OF DANTE.

PURGATORIO.

CANTO FIRST.

THE little vessel of my genius now
  Hoists sail o'er better waves to follow helm,
Turning from sea so terrible its prow:
  And I will sing now of that second realm
Wherein are purified the souls of men
  Until of heaven they worthy shall have grown.
But here dead poesy must rise again:
  O sacred Muses! I am now your own;
Nor let Calliope here fall below
  But soar to my* song! with that epic strain
Whereof those wretched magpies* felt the blow
  So that their hope of pardon was but vain.

---

* Verses 10 and 11:

'Soar to *my* song,' &c.

'. . . . *magpies*,' &c.

Ovid tells the story of the nine daughters of Pierus—Pierides—who

6

Of oriental sapphire one sweet blue
  Which overspread the beautiful serene
Of the pure ether, far as eye could view
  To heaven's first circle, brightened up my mien,
Soon as I left that atmosphere of death
  Which had my heart so saddened with mine eyes:
The beauteous planet* which gives love new breath
  With laughing light cheered all the orient skies,
Dimming the Fishes that her escort made:
  Then, turning to my right, I stood to scan
The southern pole, and four stars there surveyed—
  Save the first people, never seen by man.

---

challenged the Muses to sing, and being defeated, were changed into *magpies.* As the Muses were also called Pierides,—

'Dulcem quæ strepitum, Pieri! temperas,'

a familiar verse of Horace,—it has been supposed that the victorious Muses took the name of the vanquished maids.

In this lofty invocation Dante, many times before depressed and faltering, becomes fully conscious of his powers, and, by this allusion to the chattering fowl of antiquity, whose successors in every age fret the genuine poet, gives vent to his native scorn for all the pretenders of his art. Horace, in his *Ode to Calliope*,

'Descende cœlo, et dic age tibiâ
Regina longum, Calliope! melos,'

uses the ordinary style of poetry: 'Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεὰ,'—'Musa, mihi causas memora,'—'Sing, heavenly Muse!' &c. Dante is the first who boldly craves the goddess of epic song to be his *follower,—'seguitando 'l mio canto.'*

A curious commentator might infer from this how hard a step to Purgatory a nature like Dante's found it to gird his spirit with that 'reed of humility.'

* Venus.

Heaven seemed rejoicing in their blazing rays.
  O widowed north, how much art thou bereft
That constellation hidden from thy gaze!
  Ceasing my look, a little towards the left
(The pole whence now the Wain had disappeared)
  I turned, and saw an old* man all alone
Near me, whose aspect claimed to be revered;
  More might no father claim it of a son.
His beard was long, and streaked, as was his hair
  Which fell in two lengths down his breast, with white.
The rays of those four sacred splendours there
  So sprinkled o'er his countenance with light
It seemed to me the Sun before me stood!
  And thus he spake, shaking those reverend plumes:

CATO.

'Say, who are ye 'gainst the dark stream who could
  Fly, as ye have, the eternal dungeon's glooms?
Who was your guide? Who lighted you the way
  Escaping forth from that profoundest night
Which makes the infernal valley black for aye?
  The laws of that abyss, are they so slight?
Or is the purpose changed which heaven did please,
  That ye condemned approach these crags of mine?'

* Cato of Utica.

Here my lord beckoned me to bend my knees
  And brows (words adding to his touch and sign),
Then answered thus :—

VIRGIL.

'My will was not my guide ;
A maid from heaven besought me so to bear
  This being company that I complied.
More of our state wouldst have me to declare,
  Thy will to gainsay, my will cannot be.
This man hath never seen life's closing even,
  But through his folly came so nigh to see
That for escape but little space was given.
  Therefore was I, as I have told thee, sent
To turn him back, and other way was none
  Save this to which my guidance I have lent.
All the bad spirits I to him have shown,
  And purpose now revealing to him those
Who under thee their natures purify.
  'Twere long how I have led him to disclose,
But a grace aids me, granted from on high,
  To bring him thus to see thee and to hear :
Now may it please thee, greet him fair ! he goes
  In quest of Liberty, that is so dear ;
How dear, who spurneth life for freedom knows

Thou know'st! who didst in Utica delight
To die for her, doffing that vestment there
Which at the last great day shall show so whit
Unchanged for us th' eternal edicts are;
This man yet lives, and Minos binds not me;
I come from where thy Marcia's chaste eyes shine,
Who seems in aspect still imploring thee,
O sacred breast! that thou wilt keep her thine.
Then for her love incline thee to our prayer;
Through thy seven kingdoms grant us leave to go:
Thy grace I gratefully will tell her where
She dwells, if thou deign mentioning below.'

CATO.

'Marcia delighted so mine eyes above,
When I was there,' he answered, 'that I gave
Whate'er she asked me freely to her love.
But now she dwells that side the wicked wave
She cannot move me longer: I am stayed
By laws which when I came thence were decreed.
But since thou tell'st me a celestial maid
Urges and guides thee—of fair words what need?
Enough her name to sanction thy demand.
Go then! and let this being with a plain

Smooth reed be girt, and wash with thine own hand
His visage pure from every soil and stain:
For, until every dimness be dispersed,
It were not fitting to beclouded eyes
To come before the One who sits the First
Angel,—a ministrant of Paradise.
Round its low margent, on the yielding ooze,
Down by the far strand where the waves have strife,
This isle bears reeds: not any plant which grows
Hard, or that puts forth leaf, may there have life,
For no such stem to every stroke would bow.
In fine, not this way look to journey back:
The sun will show you, which is rising now,
To take this mountain at some easier track.'
Herewith he vanished: I straightway did rise
Without a word, and toward my guiding One
All closely drew, fastening on Him mine eyes,
Who thus began: 'Follow my steps, my son.
Turn we back this way; for this way,' he said,
'The shore sinks low to where its limits are.'
Now day's white light had quelled the morning's red
Which fled before it, so that from afar
I recognised the trembling of the main.
Like one who turns to find a pathway lost,
And till he find it seems to walk in vain,

Silent that solitary plain we crossed.
  When we had come to where the dewdrops pass
But slowly off (by reason of the shade
  The sun resisting), on the soft small grass
His outstretched palms my Master gently laid:
  Whence I, acquainted with his act's intent,
Held up my cheeks all wet with tears to him,
  While he restored unto my face besprent
My natural hue, which Hell had made so grim,
  We came soon after to the desert shore
Which never yet beheld a man who had
  Come back, once having crossed those waters o'er.
Here then he girded me as Cato bade:
  O how miraculous! with instant growth
Sprang up immediately another spray
  In the same spot,—and of the same kind both,—
Whence he had plucked the lowly reed away.

CANTO SECOND.

Now that horizon whose meridian arch
  Hangs o'er Jerusalem its topmost height
The sun had reached: while opposite, her march
  Holding in countercourse, the circling Night
Walked forth from Ganges, bearing in her hand
  The Scales that she lets fall with her advance,
So fair Aurora's cheeks, by ripe age tanned,
  From white and red grew orange to my glance.

Still by the sea we made some brief delay,
  Like lingering men, that on their journey dream,
Who go in spirit, but in body stay:
  And lo! as when, surprised by morning's beam,
Through the gross vapours Mars doth redly burn
  Down in the west upon the ocean floor;
A light appeared—oh! may that light return!
  So rapidly those waters travelling o'er,
That to its motion flying were but slow:
  Then, having momently withdrawn my gaze
To question of my Guide, I looked, and lo!
  Larger it burned, and seemed almost ablaze.

Soon from each side thereof, although I knew
  Naught what they were, something appeared of white,
And underneath another of like hue
  Little by little grew forth into sight.

My Master spake not: I meantime could spell
  Wings in those first white objects at the side:
Soon as he recognised the pilot well,
  'Behold God's Angel! bend thy knees!' he cried,
'Lift up thy palms to him; henceforward more
  Such heavenly delegates thou shalt behold!
Look how he scorns man's arguments of oar
  And sail, but simply doth unfold
His own pure pinions (winnowing the air
  And heavenward stretching those eternal pens),
From shore to shore so distant—plumes that ne'er
  Moult like the changing tresses that are men's.'

Then as more near and nearer to us drew
  That divine bird, so grew the splendour more
Till scarce the eye could bear a closer view;
  I bent mine down, and he arrived ashore
With a fleet skiff, so light upon the flood
  That without wake it skimmed the water's breast;
High on the stern the heavenly helmsman stood,

In aspect such as Holy Writ calls Blest.*
More than an hundred spirits in one band
Within sat blending in one voice their strains,
"*In exitu Israèl,*—From the land
Of Egypt,'—and what else that psalm contains.†

The sign of holy cross he made them then,
Whereat they bounded all upon the strand,
And he, swift as he came, sped back again.
The crowd that stayed looked wildly round, and scanned
The place like strangers coming to things new.
Now on all sides had Phœbus pierced the day
With his keen arrows, which so fiercely flew
That Capricorn was chased from heaven's midway,
When the new-comers raised their brows to us,
Saying: 'Show us the pathway, if ye know,
Up to the mountain.' Virgil answered thus:
'Perchance you think we know this place; not so,
We, like yourselves, are only pilgrims here:
Just before you, and by another way,
We came, a road so rugged, so severe,
That climbing this will seem thereto as play.

---

* 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.'
† Psalm cxiv.

The spirits, by my breathing who could guess
  That I was living, wan with wonder grew ;
And just as people round a herald press
  Who comes with olive wreaths, to hear what new
Tidings he bears, regardless how they tread,
  Thus gathering round, those favoured souls eyed me ;
Each one, as 'twere, forgetful how he sped
  Towards where they go, more beautiful to be.

One I beheld before the rest, who came
  As to embrace me, with such look intense
Of love, it moved me to return the same.
  Oh ! save in aspect, shadows void of sense !
Three times my hands around his form I threw,
  And thrice received them back upon my breast.
I think my face was tinged with wonder's hue ;
  For the shade smiled as after him I pressed,
And, I still following, he so sweetly said :
  'Follow no longer ;' whose that voice must be
I knew full well, and begged him, ere he fled,
  To stay a little while to speak with me.

He answered me : 'As in my mortal part
  I loved thee once, I love thee loose from clay,
And therefore stop ; but thou,—why wandering art ?'

'My dear Casella, I come not to stay,
And must return where I am dwelling still.
But tell me what has so delayed thy bliss?
'If he who taketh whom and when he will
Refused my passage oft, no wrong was this.'
The shade replied: 'To Heaven's his choice conforms:
These three months freely he hath carried o'er,
At their own pleasure, the peace-parted swarms:
Whence I, too, coasting by the sacred shore,
Where Tiber's waves grow salt, with gracious hand
Was gathered. Thitherward he now has gone,
Bending his pinions towards that opening strand,
Since all meet there who seek not Acheron.'

Then I: 'Unless the new laws here forbid
Memory or use of that love-laden style
Which all my longings once full gently chid,
Soothe with one song, beseech thee, for a while
This soul of mine, which, dragging here its clay,
Is so worn out.' Directly he began,
'*Love reasons with me,*' in so sweet a way
That the same sweetness I could hear,—I can.
We stood, my Master and myself, as though
Naught else possessed us, and that shadowy swarm,
Rapt, listening round him to his notes: and lo!

That noble old man's venerable form*
Came crying: 'How now, tardy spirits,—why
This negligence? why lingering do ye plod?
Run to the mountain, that from every eye
The scales may fall that seal your sight from God.'

As doves, when busy gathering grain or tares,
Clustered at pasture in a single flock,
Quiet, nor showing their accustomed airs,
If aught approach the timid tribe to shock,
Fly from their food, assailed by greater care,
So quit the song this new-come troop, and started
Hillward, like one who goes unknowing where:
And with no less a pace we, too, departed.

---

* The spirit of Cato of Utica, introduced in the First Canto.

CANTO THIRD.

THOUGH round the plain their quick flight scattered them,
  Bent for that Hill where reason turns our tread,*
My faithful guide close at my garment's hem
  I kept: how could I without him have sped?
Who else had o'er that mountain marshalled me?
  He seemed, methought, as inly touched with shame:
O noble conscience, void of stain, to thee
  How sharp the bite is of the smallest blame!
Soon as his feet the hurried movement checked
  Which every action's dignity destroys,
My mind, till now restrained and circumspect,
  Expanded with new strength, as 'twere of joy's.
My face I fixed upon that Hill to gaze
  Towards highest heaven which springeth from the wave.
The sun behind me redly flamed; its rays
  Broke by the shadow which my figure gave.
When I perceived before me that the ground

* Dante means the Hill of Purgatory, to the ascent of which we are turned no less by the right reason that is in us than by our contrition for an erroneous course, from which we are happily passing.

Was darkened only by myself, in dread
Of being there deserted, I looked round
And fronting me in full, my Comfort said :
'Why this distrust ? believ'st thou not that I
Am with thee still, thy leader to the last ?
'Tis evening now already where on high
My body lies, which once a shadow cast,
Buried at Naples, from Brundusium brought.
Now, if no shade before me meet thy sight
It need wake no more wonder in thy thought
Than why one ray checks not another's light.
Omnipotence to such forms hath assigned
The powers of suffering torments—cold and heat—
But how, reveals not to created kind.
He is but mad who hopes this incomplete
Reason of ours may track the Infinite way
Which of three persons holds the substance one.
Rest, human race ! contented when you say
Simply because : could ye the whole have known
No need had been for Mary to have borne ;
And ye have seen in hopeless longing those
Who now to all eternity must mourn
Desire for which they vainly sought repose.
Of Aristotle and of Plato now
I speak, and many others :' he remained

Silent at this, and stood with bended brow
  And troubled look : meantime the Hill we gained.

We found the cliff here sloping so steep down
  That nimblest legs had there been useless quite.
The wildest way betwixt Turbìa's town
  And Lèrici, the roughest, were a flight
Compared with this, of open, easy stairs.
  'Who knows,' my Master said—and stayed his pace—
'Where this Hill slopeth, so that one who wears
  No wings may climb it?' then his earnest face
Directed closely to the ground as if
  Making in mind a study of the way.
Meantime I gazed up round about the cliff,
  And on the left hand came to my survey
A band of spirits, moving on towards us,
  That seemed not moving, for they came so slow.
'Lift up thine eyes,' I to the Master thus,
  'If of thyself thou art not certain, lo!
Yon souls our footsteps may direct perchance.'
  Thereat he looked, then frankly made reply;
'Go we tow'rds *them*—so gently they advance—
  And thou, my sweet son! keep thy hope up high.'

That people seemed as far, when we had gone

A thousand steps, I say, or thereabout,
As a good flinger might have cast a stone;
When all at once, like one who goes in doubt
And stops to look, their moderate march they checked,
And close to that high bank's hard masses drew.
'O ye peace-parted! O ye spirits elect!
Ev'n by that peace which waits for each of you
As I believe,' thus Virgil them bespake,
'Inform us where this mountain slopeth so
That its ascent we may essay to make;
For they mourn Time's loss most, the most who know.'

Like lambs that issue from their fold—one—two—
Then three at once (the rest all standing shy,
With eye and nostril to the ground), then do
Just what the foremost doth, unknowing why,
And crowd upon her back if she but stand,
Quiet and simple creatures, thus the head
I saw move towards us of that happy band,
Modest in face, and of a comely tread.

Soon as their leaders noticed that the light
On my right side lay broken at my feet,
So that my shadow reached the rocky height,
They stopped and drew a little in retreat,

And all the others following, though they knew
  Naught why they drew back, did the very same.
'Without your question I confess to you
  That here you see a living human frame:
Hence on the ground the sunlight thus is riven:
  Marvel not at it, but believe ye all
Not without virtue by the Most High given
  This man hath come to scale your Mountain's wall.'
My Master thus, and thus that gracious band:
  'Turn then and join us, and before us go:'
And while some beckoned us with bended hand,
  One called: 'Whoe'er thou art there journeying so,
Turn! Think,—hast ever looked on me before?'
  I turned and gazed upon the one who spoke.
Handsome and blond, he looked high-born, but o'er
  One brow appeared the severance of a stroke.
When I had humbly answered him that ne'er
  Had I beheld him,—'Look!' he said, and high
Up on his breast showed me a wound he bare;
  Then added smilingly:

'Manfred am I,
The Empress Constance' grandson: in such name
  Do I entreat, when back thou shalt have gone,
To my fair daughter hie, of whose womb came

Sicily's boast and Aragon's renown,
And tell her this, if aught but truth be said,
That after two stabs—each of power to kill—
I gave my soul back weeping ere it fled
To Him who pardoneth of His own free will;
My sins were horrible; but large embrace
Infinite Goodness hath, whose arms will ope
For every child who turneth back to Grace;
And if Cosenza's bishop, by the Pope
Clement set on to hound me to the last,
That page of Holy Writ had better read,
My bones had still been sheltered from the blast
Near Benevento, by the bridge's head,
Under their load of stones; but now without
The realm they lie, by Verde's river—bare—
For winds and rains to beat and blow about,
Dragged with quench'd candles and with curses there.
Yet not by their poor malediction can
Souls be so lost but that Eternal Love
May be brought back while hope hath life in man.
'Tis true that one who sets himself above
The Holy Church, and dies beneath its ban
(Even though he had repented at the last),
Outside this Mount must unadmitted rove
Thirty times longer than the term had been

Of his presumptuous contumacy past,
  Unless good prayers a shorter penance win.
See now what power thou hast to make me glad;
  Report of me to my good Constance bear,
How thou saw'st me, and what I've told thee add;
  For much it profits us what they do there.'

CANTO FOURTH.

WHENE'ER the mind, from any joy or pain
In any faculty, to that alone
Bends its whole strength, its other powers remain
Unexercised, it seems (whereby is shown
Plain contradiction of th' erroneous view
Which holds within us kindled several souls).
Hence, when we hear or see a thing whereto
The mind is strongly drawn, unheeded rolls
The passing hour; the man observes it not:
That power is one whereby we hear or see,
And that another which absorbs our thought;
This being chained, as 'twere—the former free.

A real experience of this truth had I,
Listening that soul, and wondering at such force,
For now the sun full fifty degrees high
Had risen without my noticing his course,
When came we where the spirits, with one voice all,
Cried out to us, 'Behold the place ye seek!'
A wider opening oft, in hedge or wall,

Some farmer, when the grape first browns its cheek,
  Stops with one forkful of his brambles thrown,
Than was the narrow pass whereby my Guide
  Began to climb, I following on alone,
While from our way I saw those wanderers glide.

  A man may climb St. Leo, or descend
The steeps of Noli, or Bismantua's height
  Scale to the top, and on his feet depend;
Here one should fly! I mean he needs the light
  Pinions and plumage of a strong desire,
Under such leadership as gave me hope
  And lighted me my way. Advancing higher
In through the broken rock, it left no scope
  On either side, but cramped us close; the ledge
O'er which we crept required both feet and hands.
  When we had toiled up to the utmost edge
Of the high bank, where the clear coast expands,
  'Which way,' said I, 'my Master, shall we take?'
And he to me, 'Let not thy foot fall back;
  Still follow me, and for the mountain make,
Until some guide appear who knows the track.'
  Its top sight reached not, and the hillside rose
With far more salient angle than the line
  That from half-quadrant to the centre goes.

Most weary was I: 'Gentle Father mine,'
  I thus broke silence, 'turn and see that if
Thou stay not for me, I remain alone.'
  'Struggle, my son, as far as yonder cliff,'
He said, and pointed upwards to a zone
  Terracing all the mountain on that side.
His word so spurred me that I forced myself
  And clambered on still close behind my Guide
Until my feet were on that girdling shelf.

  Here we sat down and turned our faces towards
The East, from which point we had made ascent
  (For looking back on toil some rest affords);
And on the low shore first mine eyes I bent,
  Then raised them sunward, wondering as I gazed
How his light smote us from the left. While thus
  I stared, he marked how I beheld amazed
Day's chariot entering 'twixt the North and us.
  'Were yonder mirror now,' the Poet said,
'That with his light leads up and down the spheres,
  In Castor and Pollux, thou wouldst see the red
Zodiac revolving closer to the Bears,
  If it swerved nothing from its ancient course;
Which fact to fathom wouldst thou power command,
  Imagine, with thy mind's collected force,

This mount and Zion so on earth to stand
  That though in adverse hemispheres, the twain
One sole horizon have: thence 'tis not hard
  To see (if clear thine intellect remain)
How the Sun's road—which Phaeton, ill-starred,
  Knew not to keep—must pass that mountain o'er
On one, and this hill on the other side.'
  'Certes, my Master,—ne'er saw I before
So clear as at this moment,' I replied,
  '(Where seemed but now my understanding maimed),
How the mid-circle of the heavenly spheres
  And of their movements—the Equator named
In special term of art—which never veers
  From its old course, 'twixt winter and the Sun,
Yet for the reason thou dost now assign,
  Towards the Septentrion from this point doth run,
While to the Jews it bore a South decline.
  But if it please thee, gladly would I learn
How far we have to journey; for so high
  This hill soars that mine eyes cannot discern
The top thereof.' He made me this reply:

  'Such is this mountain that for one below
The first ascent is evermore severe,
  It grows less painful higher as we go.

So when to thee it pleasant shall appear
  That no more toil thy climbing shall attend
Than sailing *down*, the way the current flows,
  Then art thou near unto thy pathway's end;
There from thy labour look to find repose.
  I know that this is true, but say no more.'
And this word uttered, not far off addressed
  Me thus a voice: 'It may be that before
That pass, thou wilt have need to sit and rest.'
  At sound thereof we both looked round, and there
Beheld a huge rock, close to our left hand,
  Whereof till now we had not been aware.
Thither we toiled, and in its shade a band
  Behind it stood with a neglectful air,
As men in idleness are wont to stand.

Belacqua the Sluggard.

  And one was seated, hanging down his face
Between his knees, which he with languid limb,
  Looking exhausted, held in his embrace.
'O my sweet Seignior!' I exclaimed, 'note him!
  Lazier-looking than had laziness been
His sister-born.' Turning towards us, at length

He gazed, slow lifting o'er his thigh his chin,
And drawled, 'Go up, then, thou who hast such strength.
I knew who *that* was then; and though the ascent
Had made me pant somewhat, I kept my pace,
Spite of short breath; close up to him I went,
And he droned forth, scarce lifting up his face,
'Hast thou found out yet how the Sun this way
O'er thy left shoulder doth his chariot guide?'
His sloth, and what few words he had to say,
Made me smile slightly, and I thus replied:
'No more, Belacqua, do I mourn thy fate;
But tell me wherefore in this place I see
Thee sitting thus? Dost thou for escort wait,
Or has thy old slow habit seized on thee?'

And he—'O brother! what boots it to climb?
God's Angel sitting at the gate denies
Me way to penance until so much time
Be past as living I beheld the skies.
Outside I must remain here for the crime
Of dallying to the last my contrite sighs,
Unless I happily some help derive
From the pure prayer ascending from a heart
That lives in grace: a prayer not thus alive
Heaven doth not hear: what aid can such impart?'

Now before me the Poet up the height
Began to climb, saying, 'Come on, for o'er
This hill's meridian hangs the Sun, and Night
Sets foot already on Morocco's shore.'

CANTO FIFTH.

ALREADY parted from those shades, I went
  Following the footsteps of my Guide, when one
Behind me towards my form his finger bent,
  Exclaiming, 'See! no ray falls from the sun
To the left hand of him that walks below!
  And sure! he moveth like a living man.'
Mine eyes I turned, at hearing him say so,
  And saw them with a gaze all wonder scan
Now me, still me, and now the broken light
  My body caused. The Master then to me:
'Why let thy wonder keep thee from the height
  To drag so slowly? what concerns it thee
What here is whispered? only follow thou
  After my steps, and let the crowd talk on:
Stand like a tower, firm-based, that will not bow
  Its head to breath of winds that soon are gone.
The man o'er whose thought second thought hath sway,
  Wide of his mark is ever sure to miss,
Because one force the other wears away.'

What could I answer but — 'I come'—to this?
I said it something sprinkled with the hue
Which, in less faults, excuseth one from blame.
Meanwhile across the mountain-side there drew,
Just in our front, a train that as they came
Sang *Miserere*, verse by verse. When they
Observed my form, and noticed that I gave
No passage through me to the solar ray,
Into a long hoarse 'O!' they changed their stave;
And two, as envoys, ran up with demand,
'In what condition is it that ye go?'
And my Lord said, 'Return ye to the band
Who sent you towards us, and give them to know
This body is true flesh. If they delayed
At sight,—I deem so,—of the shadow here,
Thereby sufficient answer shall be made:
Him let them reverence,—it may prove dear.'

I never saw a meteor dart so quick
Through the serene at midnight, or a gleam
Of lightning flash at sunset, through a thick
Piled August cloud, but these would faster seem
As they retreated; having joined the rest,
Back like an unreined troop towards us they sped.
'This throng is large by whom we thus are pressed,

And come to implore of thee,' the Poet said ;
'Therefore keep on, and as thou mov'st attend.'

'O soul who travellest, with the very frame
Which thou wert born with, to thy blessed end,
Stay thy step somewhat!'—crying thus they came.
'Look if among us any thou dost know,
That thou of him to earth mayst tidings bear.
Stay, wilt thou not? ah! wherefore must thou go?
We to our dying hour were sinners there;
And all were slain; but at the murderous blow,
Warned us an instant light that flashed from heaven,
And all from life did peacefully depart,
Contrite, forgiving, and by Him forgiven,
To look on Whom such longing yearns our heart.'
'None do I recognise,' I answered, 'even
Scanning your faces with mine utmost art;
But whatsoe'er, ye blessed souls, I may
To give you comfort, speak, and I will do;
Yea, by that peace which leads me on my way
From world to world such guidance to pursue.'

JACOPO DI FANO.

'Without such protestation,' one replied,
'Unless thy will a want of power defeat,

In thy kind offices we all confide;
  Whence I, sole speaking before these, entreat
If thou mayst e'er the territory see
  That lies betwixt Romagna and the seat *
Where Charles hath sway, that thou so courteous be
  As to implore the men in Fano's town
To put up prayers there earnestly for me
  That I may purge the sins that weigh me down.
There I was born; but those deep wounds of mine
  Through which my life-blood issued, I received
Among the children of Antènor's line, †
  Where most secure my person I believed;
'Twas through that lord of Este I was sped
  Who past all justice had me in his hate.
O'ertak'n at Oriaco, had I fled
  Towards Mira, still where breath is I might wait.
But to the marsh I made my way instead,
  And there, entangled in the cany brake
And mire, I fell, and on the ground saw spread,
  From mine own veins outpoured, a living lake.'

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* The Marquisate or March of Ancona was then governed by Charles of Valois, who held Naples.

† That is, in the territory of Padua, founded, as the student will remember by the Trojan Antenor, whose tomb is shown in Padua to this day.

Buonconte di Montefeltro.

Here spake another; 'O may that desire
So be fulfilled which to the lofty Mount
Conducts thy feet as thou shalt bring me nigher
To mine by thy good prayers. I am the Count
Buonconte; Montefeltro's lord was I.
Giovanna cares not, no one cares for me;
Therefore with these I go dejectedly.'
And I to him: 'What violence took thee,
Or chance of war, from Campaldino then
So far that none e'er knew thy burial-place?'
'O,' answered he, 'above the hermit's glen *
A stream, whose course is Casentino's base,
Springs in the Apennine, Archiano called;
There, where that name is lost in Arno's flood,
Exhausted I arrived, footsore and galled,
Pierced in my throat, painting the plain with blood.
Here my sight failed me and I fell; the last
Word that I spake was Mary's name, and then
From my deserted flesh the spirit passed.
The truth I tell now, tell to living men;

* That is to say, the hermitage of the Camaldolites in Milton's Vall'ombrosa.

God's Angel took me, but that fiend of Hell
  Screamed out: 'Ha! thou from heaven, why robb'st thou me?
His soul thou get'st for one small tear that fell,
  But of this offal other work I'll see.'
Thou know'st how vapours gathering in the air
  Mount to the cold and there condensed distil
Back into water. That Bad Will which ne'er
  Seeks aught but evil joined his evil will,
With intellect, and, from the great force given
  By his fell nature, moved the mist and wind,
And o'er the valley drew the darkened heaven,
  Covering it with clouds as day declined
From Pratomagno far as the great chain,*
  So that the o'erburdened air to water turned;
Then the floods fell, and every rivulet's vein
  Swelled with the superflux the soaked earth spurned.
When to large streams the mingling torrents grew,
  Down to the royal river with such force
They rushed that no restraint their fury knew.
  Here fierce Archiano found my frozen corse
Stretched at its mouth, and into Arno's wave
  Dashed it and loosened from my breast the sign,

* Far as to the Upper Apennines.

Which when mine anguish mastered me I gave,
  Of holy cross with my crossed arms : in fine,
O'er bed and bank my form the streamlet drave
  Whirling, and with its own clay covered mine.'

Pia de' Tolommei.

'O stay! when thou shalt walk the world once more,
  And have repose from that long way of thine,'—
Said the third spirit, following those before,
  'Remember Pia! for that name was mine :
Sienna gave me birth : Maremma's fen
  Was my undoing : he knows that full well
Who ringed my finger with his gem and then,
  After espousal,—*took me there to dwell.*'

CANTO SIXTH.

WHEN from the game of hazard men depart,
  The loser stays, and, casting o'er his throws,
Learns a hard lesson with a heavy heart!
  While with the winner all the assembly goes:
One runs before, one plucks his robe behind,
  But he delays not, though beside his way
Another comrade calls himself to mind:
  And every one perceives that he would say:
'*Press me no more!*' to whom he lifts his hand,
  And by so doing keeps the crowd at bay;
Such I was, freeing me from that dense band,
  To this and that one bending my survey,
And promising to answer each demand.

Here was that Aretine whose lethal wound
  The savage hands of Ghin' di Tacco made;
Also that knight who in pursuit was drowned.
  Here with stretched palms Frederic Novello prayed,

The Pisan, too, at whose defeat his sire,
  Good old Marzucco, showed a strength sublime.
I saw Count Orso, and that soul whom dire
  Envy and spite, but no committed crime,
Tore from his mortal frame, as he declared;
  Pierre de la Brosse I mean; so, while she may,
Be that bad woman of Brabant prepared
  Lest she go join a far worse flock than they.

When I had freed me from the gathering press
  Of shadows praying still that others' prayers
Might hasten forward their own blessedness,
  I thus began: 'Thy page, my Light! declares
Expressly, in one text, that Heaven's decree
  To no beseeching bendeth.* Yet this race
Prays with such purpose: will their praying be
  Without avail? or have I in that place
Misread thy word?' He answered: 'It is gross
  And plain to reason: no fallacious hope
Is theirs, if thy sound mind consider close;
  The topmost height of judgment doth not slope,
Because love's fire may instantly complete
  The penance due from one of these; but where

* 'Desine fata deûm flecti sperare precando.'—VIRG. *Æn.* vi. 376.

I closed that point with words which you repeat,
  A gulf betwixt the Most High was and prayer :
No praying there could cover past defect.
  Yet verily, in so profound a doubt
Rest not, till she who, 'twixt thine intellect
  And truth, shall be thy light, herself speak out.
Dost understand me? Beatris I mean :
  Thou shalt behold her in a loftier place,
This mountain summit, smiling and serene.'
  'Good Guide,' said I, 'then let us mend our pace,
I feel no more my weariness : o'er us
  The mountain shadow grows and hides mine own.
'We will go forward'—he gave answer thus—
  'Far as we can, ere this day's light be gone;
But thy thought wanders from the fact. That height
  Ere thou canst gain, thou shalt behold the day's
Returning orb, who now so hides his light
  Behind the hill that thou break'st not his rays.
But yonder look! one spirit, all alone,
  By itself stationed, bends toward us his gaze:
The readiest passage will by him be shown.'

We came up tow'rds it : O proud Lombard soul!
  How thou didst wait, in thy disdain unstirred,
And thy majestic eyes didst slowly roll!

Meanwhile to us it never uttered word,
But let us move, just giving us a glance,
Like as a lion looks in his repose.
Then Virgil, making a more near advance,
Prayed him to show us where the mountain rose
With easier slope, and still that soul replied
Nothing to his demand; but question made
About life, and our country. My sweet Guide
Began to answer: 'Mantua'—and the shade
From where it *had* been, separate from his band,
All rapt in self, sprang up towards him in haste.
Saying: 'O Mantuan, I am of thy land,
I am Sordello.' And the twain embraced.

Ah slavish Italy! thou common inn
For woe to lodge at! without pilot, thou
Ship in great tempest! not what thou hast been,
Lady of provinces, but brothel now!
That gentle soul so quickly, at the dear
Sound that recalled his country, forward came
To grace his townsman with a greeting here;
And now thy living children, to their shame,
Are all at war, and they who dwell most near
Prey, each on each, with moat and wall the same?
Search, wretched! search all round thine either coast,

And then look inland, in thy bosom, see
If peace in any part of thee thou know'st!
What though Justinian made new reins for thee,
What boots it if the saddle remain void?
Without his mending thy disgrace were less.
And O ye tribe that ought to be employed
In your devotions, and let Cæsar press
The seat of Cæsar, if God's word you heed,
See, since your hand hath on the bridle been,
How wanton grown and wicked is the steed,
Through want from you of the spur's discipline.
O German Albert! who abandonest
Her now run wild, unchecked by curb of thine,
When thou shouldst ride her with thy heels hard-pressed;
May heaven's just judgment light upon thy line,
And be it something strange, and manifest,
To make him tremble that comes after thee,
Because, for lust of barren fiefs out there, *
Thou and thy Father have not shamed to see
The empire's garden desolate and bare.
Come see the Capulets and Montagues,
Monaldi and Filippeschi, O thou being
Without concern! these wan with fears, and those

* In Germany.

Already crushed : come sate thyself with seeing,
  Thou cruel man, the outrage that is done
To thy best blood, and make their bruises well !
  And thou shalt see, too, thou cold looker-on,
Santafiore's lords how safe they dwell.
  Come see thy Rome that mourning all alone
Weepeth, a widow, calling day and night,
  Why, O my Cæsar, dost thou leave thine own ?
Come see what love there—how all hearts unite !
  And if no pity move thee at our moan
Blush for thy fame beholding such a sight.
  And, lawful if I speak, O most high Jove,
Who wast for our sakes crucified on earth,
  Are thy just eyes who watchest men above
Turned elsewhere ?—Or is this before the birth
  Of some great good a preparation hid
From us in the abyss of thy intent,
  That all the Italian towns are tyrant-rid,
And every clown that comes on faction bent
  Makes as much clamour as Marcellus did ?

My Florence ! well may'st thou remain content
  At this digression ; it concerns not thee,
Thanks to thy people, great in argument !
  Many with justice in their hearts there be

Who stay the shaft lest, coming to the bow
  Without discretion, it might err; but they
On their lips wear it. Many men are slow
  To serve the state, and turn from place away;
Thy people do not — every one bends low,
  Crying before he's called for: 'I obey.'
Now make thee joyful, who may'st triumph well;
  Thou who art rich — so wise! and so at peace!
If I speak true in this, — let the truth tell.
  Athens and Sparta, that raised civil Greece
To such a height, and framed the ancient laws,
  Towards the well-ordered life made small beginning
Compared with thee, whose legislation draws
  Threads out so fine that thy October spinning
Comes before mid-November to a pause.
  How many times hast thou renewed thy men,
Yea, within days that in thy memory dwell,
  And changed thy laws and offices, and then
Customs and coins! if thou remember well
  Thou wilt behold thyself, unless quite blind,
Like a sick woman, restless, that in vain
  Seeks on her pillow some repose to find,
And turns and turns as 'twere to parry pain.

CANTO SEVENTH.

THREE times and four these greetings, glad and free,
  Had been repeated, when Sordello's shade
Drew from embrace, and said: 'Now, who are ye?'
  And thereupon my Guide this answer made:
'Ere to this mountain those just souls, to whom
  Heavenward to climb was given, had guided been,
My bones Octavian gathered to the tomb.
  Virgil I am, and for none other sin
But want of faith was I from heaven shut out.'
  Like one who suddenly before him sees
Something that wakes his wonder, whence, in doubt,
  He says, *It is not;* then believing, *'Tis!*
Sordello stood, then back to him without
  Lifting his eyelids, turned and clasped his knees.
'O glory of the Latin race!' he cried,
  'Through whom to such a height our language rose,
Oh! of my birthplace everlasting pride,
  What merit or grace on me thy sight bestows?

Tell me, unless to hear thee is denied,
  Com'st thou from hell, or where hast thou repose?'

VIRGIL.

He to this answered: 'Grace from heaven moved me,
  And leads me still: the circles every one
Of sorrow's kingdom have I trod to thee.
  My sight is barred from that supernal Sun,
Whom I knew late, and thou desir'st to see,
  Not for I did, but for I left undone.
A place below there is where no groans rise
  From torment, sad alone with want of light,
Where the lament sounds not like moan, but sighs.
  The little innocents whom Death's fell bite
Snatched, ere their sin was purified, are there:
  And there I dwell with guiltless ones that still
The three most holy virtues did not wear,
  Though all the rest they knew, and did fulfil.
But if thou knowest, and may'st us apprise,
  Tell us how we most speedily may find
Where Purgatory's actual entrance lies.' *

* 'Là dove 'l Purgatorio ha dritto inizio.'

SORDELLO.

'We have,' he answered, 'no set place assigned;
Around and upward I am free to stray;
My guidance far as I may go I lend:
But see how fast already fails the day!
And in the night none ever can ascend:
Best, then, we think of some good resting-place.
Some souls there be, removed here to the right,
Whom, if thou wilt, I'll show thee face to face,
And thou shalt know them not without delight.'
'How then,' said Virgil, 'should a soul aspire
To climb by night, would other check be found?
Or his own weakness hinder his desire?'
And good Sordello drew along the ground
His finger, saying: 'Look! not even this line
May'st thou pass over when the sun hath gone:
Not that aught else, though, would thy power confine,
Save want of light, from journeying upwards on:
Darkness makes impotent thy will. By night
One may go back again, and grope below,
And, while the horizon shuts the day from sight,
Wander about the hillside to and fro.'
My Master then, as 'twere in wonder spake:

'Now lead us thitherward where thou hast said,
That we in lingering shall such pleasure take.'
Nor had we forward far advanced our tread,
When I perceived that on the mountain-side
A valley opened, just like valleys here.
'We will go forward,' said our shadowy guide,
'Where on the slope yon hollow doth appear;
There let us wait the dawning of the day.'
'Twixt steep and level went a winding path
Which led us where the vale-side dies away
Till less than half its height the margin hath.

Gold and fine silver, ceruse, cochineal,
India's rich wood, heaven's lucid blue serene,
Or glow that emeralds freshly broke reveal,
Had all been vanquished by the varied sheen
Of this bright valley set with shrubs and flowers,
As less by greater. Nor had Nature there
Only in painting spent herself, but showers
Of odours manifold made sweet the air
With one strange mingling of confused perfume,
And there new spirits chanting, I descried,
'*Salve Regina!*' seated on the bloom
And verdure sheltered by the dingle side.

SORDELLO.

'Ere yon low sun shall nestle in his bed'
  (Began the Mantuan who had brought us here),
'Desire not down among them to be led;
  You better will observe how they appear,
Both face and action, from this bank, instead
  Of mixing with them in the dale. That one
Who sits the highest, looking, 'mid the throng,
  As though some duty he had left undone,
Who moves his lips not with the rest in song,
  Was Rodolph, Emperor, he who might have healed
Those wounds which Italy have so far spent
  That slow relief all other helpers yield.
The other, that on soothing him seems bent,
  Once ruled the region whence those waters are
Which Moldau bears to Elbe, and Elbe the sea.
  His name was Ottocar, and better far,
Yea, in his very swaddling-robe, was he
  Than Vincislaus, his big-bearded son
Whom luxury and ease have made so gross.
  And he of slender nose, who, with the one
So bland of aspect, seems in consult close,
  Died flying, and in dust his lilies laid.

Look ! how he beats the breast he cannot calm :
  Mark too his mate there sighing, who hath made
For his pale cheek a pillow of his palm !
  One is the Father of that pest of France,
Father-in-law the other : well they know
  His lewd, base life ! this misery is the lance
That to the core cuts either of them so.
  And he so stout of limb, in unison
Singing with him there of the manly nose,
  Of every virtue put the girdle on ;
And if that youth behind him in repose
  Had after him reigned in his Father's stead,
Virtue from vase to vase had been well poured,
  Which of the other heirs may not be said.
Frederic and James now o'er those kingdoms lord,
  In whom that better heritage lies dead.
Rarely doth human goodness rise again
  Through the tree's branches : He hath willed it so
Who gives this boon of excellence, that men
  Should ask of Him who can alone bestow.'
'Not more these words of mine at Peter glance
  Than him he sings with (of the large nose there)
Whose loss Apulia mourneth, and Provènce,
  So ill the tree doth with its stock compare !
Even so much more of her good lord his wife

Constance yet vaunts herself, than Margaret may,
Or Beatris. That king of simplest life,
Harry of England, seated there survey
All by himself: his branches are more blest!
The one who sits there with uplifted gaze
Among the group, but lower than the rest,
Is Marquis William, in whose cause the frays
Of Alexandria have with grief oppressed
Both Monferrato and the Canavese.'

CANTO EIGHTH.

'Twas now the hour that brings to men at sea,
  Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell,
Fond thoughts and longing back with them to be ;
  And thrills the pilgrim with a tender spell
Of love, if haply, new upon his way,
  He faintly hear a chime from some far bell,
That seems to mourn the dying of the day ;
  When I forbore my listening faculty
To mark one spirit uprisen amid the band,
  Who joined both palms and lifted them on high
(First having claimed attention with his hand)
  And towards the Orient bent so fixed an eye
As 'twere he said, ' My God ! on thee alone
  My longing rests.' Then from his lips there came
' *Te lucis ante,*' so devout of tone,
  So sweet, my mind was ravished by the same :
The others next, full sweetly and devout,
  Fixing their gaze on the supernal wheels,
Followed him chanting the whole Psalm throughout.

Now, reader, to the truth my verse conceals
Make sharp thy vision; subtle is the veil,
So fine 'twere easily passed through unseen.
I saw that gentle army, meek and pale,
Silently gazing upward with a mien
As of expectancy, and from on high
Beheld two angels with two swords descend
Which flamed with fire, but, as I could descry,
They bare no points, being broken at the end.
Green robes, in hue more delicate than spring's
Tender new leaves, they trailed behind and fanned
With gentle beating of their verdant wings.
One, coming near, just over us took stand,
Down to th' opponent bank the other sped,
So that the spirits were between them grouped.
Full well could I discern each flaxen head;
But in their faces mine eyes' virtue drooped,
As 'twere confounded by excess and dead.
'From Mary's bosom thay have both come here,'
Sordello said—'this valley to protect
Against the serpent that will soon appear:'
Whence I, unknowing which way to expect
This object, turned me, almost froze with fear,
And to those trusty shoulders closely clung.
Again Sordello: 'Go we down and see

These mighty shades, and let them hear our tongue:
  Thy presence will to them right gracious be.'
Only three steps I think brought me below,
  Where one I noticed solely eyeing me,
As if who I might be he fain would know.

  'Twas dusk, yet not so but the dusky air,
Between his eyes and mine, within the dell,
  Showed what before it did not quite declare.
Towards me he moved, and I towards him as well:
  Gentle Judge Nino, when I saw thee there
What joy was mine to find thee not in hell!
  We left unsaid no form of fair salute:
Then he inquired: 'How long since thou didst come
  O'er the far waters to the mountain's foot?'
'O but this morn,' said I, 'the realms of gloom
  I passed: in the first life I am, but fain
Would find the next by following on this track.'
  Like to men suddenly amazed, the twain,
He and Sordello, hearing this, drew back.
  One looked at Virgil, one into the face
Of a companion sitting there, and cried,
  'Up, Conrad! see what God hath of His grace
Bestowed,' then turning unto me replied:

NINO VISCONTI.

'By that especial reverence, I beseech,
Which thou ow'st Him whose primal way is hid
So that none sound it, if soe'er thou reach
The shore beyond the vasty waters, bid
My child Giovanna for my peace implore
There where the cry of innocents heaven heeds.
Her mother I am sure loves me no more
Since she put off her widow's paly weeds,
But in her misery fain would wear this day.
From her full readily may one be taught
How soon love's flame in woman dies away
If sight or touch full oft relume it not.
The chanticleer upon Gallura's shield
Had graced her sepulchre with fairer show
Than will that viper, which to battle-field
Marshals the men of Milan.' With such glow
He uttered this as in his face revealed
The heart's just passion smouldering yet below.

Still that sole part of heaven I fondly eyed
Where the stars move, even as a wheel doth move
More slowly next the axle. Said my Guide:

'Son, what dost thou so gaze at there above?'
'Up there! at yon three torches,' I replied,
'Whose splendour makes this pole here all ablaze.'
And he to me: 'The four clear stars that rose
This morn before thee have abased their rays,
And these have mounted in the place of those.'
While thus he spake, Sordello to his side
Drew Virgil, and exclaimed: 'Behold our Foe!'
And pointed to the thing which he descried:
And where that small vale's barrier sinks most low
A serpent suddenly was seen to glide,
Such as gave Eve, perchance, the fruit of woe.
Through flowers and herbage came that evil streak,
To lick its back oft turning round its head,
As with his tongue a beast his fur doth sleek.
I was not looking, so must leave unsaid
When first they fluttered, but full well I saw
Both heavenly falcons had their plumage spread.
Soon as the serpent felt the withering flaw
Of those green wings, it vanished, and they sped
Up to their posts again with even flight.
The shade who had approached the judge when he
Accosted him, had never moved his sight
Through this encounter, looking fixed on me.

Conrad Malaspina.

'So may that light,' the spirit began to say,
  'Which leads thee up, find in thine own free will
Sufficient wax to last thee all the way,
  Even to th' enamelled summit of the Hill.
If thou true news of Val di Magra know'st,
  Or of those parts, inform me of the same,
For I was mighty once upon that coast,
  And Conrad Malaspina was my name.
Not the old lord, but his descendant, I:
  The love which once I to my kindred bore
Is here refined.' 'O,' thus I made reply,
  'That realm of yours I never travelled o'er;
But where throughout all Europe is the place
  That knows it not? The honour Fame accords
Your house illustrates not alone the race,
  But makes the land renowned as are its lords;
He knows that country who was never there:
  Still the free purse they bear, and still bright swords:
So mount my soul as this to thee I swear!
  Custom and nature privilege them so,
That, if through guilt the world's guide lead astray,
  They in the path of right straightforward go

Sole of all men, and scorn the evil way.'
  To these my words, 'Now go,' the spirit said,
For the sun shall not enter seven times more
  That part of heaven where Aries o'er his bed
Stretches and spreads his forked feet all four,
  Ere this thy courtesy's belief shall be
Nailed in the middle of thy head with nails
  Of greater force than men's reports to thee
If, unimpeded, Judgment's course prevails.

CANTO NINTH.

FORTH from the arms of her beloved now,
  Whitening the orient steep, the concubine *
Of old Tithonus came, her lucent brow
  Adorned with gems whose figure formed the sign †
Of that cold animal whose tail with dread
  Strikes trembling nations; and the night, where we
Now were, had made of her ascending tread
  Two of her paces and was making three,
With wings through weariness less fully spread,
  When I, in whom the weakness was alive
Of Adam's nature, sank in slumber's power
  Where sat already on the grass all five.

Near to the dawning and about the hour
  When first the little swallow wakes her lays
(Haply remembering her old woes afresh),
  And when our mind, relieved of thinking, strays

* Aurora. † Scorpio.

More of a pilgrim from its cage of flesh
  Till to its vision 'tis almost divine,
Dreaming, I seemed to see in heaven suspended
  An eagle that with golden plumes did shine
And with spread wings as he to swoop intended:
  And in that place it seemed to be, methought,
Where Ganymede, abandoning his own,
  Was up to heaven's high consistory caught.
Then I considered; haply here alone
  His wont to strike is, and he scorns elsewhere
To bear up what he snatches in his feet;
  Methought he next wheeled somewhat in the air,
Then struck like lightning, terrible and fleet,
  And rapt me up to the empyrean: there
We burned together in so fierce a heat,
  And such of that imagined fire the smart,
My dream perforce was by the scorching broke.
  Not otherwise Achilles with a start
Rolled his amazed eyes round him, newly woke,
  And knowing nothing where he was, when flying
His mother bore him, slumbering on her breast,
  From Chiron to the isle of Scyros hieing,
Whence the Greeks, after, forced him with the rest,
  Than I too started! so that all repose
Fled from my features; deadly pale and chill

I grew, like one whom fear hath well-nigh froze.
Sole stood my Comforter beside me still;
My face was towards the sea-shore turned; the sun
Was risen already more than two hours high.
'Fear not,' my Lord said, 'we have well begun:
Shrink not! but every way enlarge thy strength;
Thou hast arrived at Purgatory! See
Yon cliff that circles it; behold at length
The entrance, parted where it seems to be.'

In the white light that comes before the morn
While slumbering in thee lay thy soul, there came
Over the flowers this valley that adorn
A woman, saying, 'Lucia is my name;
This man here sleeping let me take in care;
So shall I speed him forward on his way.'
Sordello, with his gentle comrades there,
Remained: she took thee and, at dawn of day,
Up hither sped, and I behind her straight.
Here she reposed thee; first with her fair eyes
Showing the aperture of yonder gate,
Then vanished and thy sleep in even wise.
As a man, doubting, comforteth his fear
At truth's discovery, confident once more,
So did I change; and seeing me appear

Without inquietude, my Guide up o'er
The cliff moved on, I following in his rear.

Reader, thou well observ'st to what a height
I lift my matter, therefore wonder not
If with more art I strengthen what I write.
We still approached and now had reached the spot
Where that which first had seemed to me a rent,
Like to a fissure in a wall, my view
Made out a gate, and leading to it went
Three steps, and each was of a different hue;
A guardian sat there keeping the ascent.
As yet he spake not, and as more and more
Mine eyes I opened, on the topmost stair
I saw him sitting, and the look he wore
Was of such brightness that I could not bear.
The rays were so reflected from his face
By a drawn sword that glistened in his hand
That oft I turned to look in empty space:

Then he began: 'Speak ye from where ye stand!
What seek ye here? who leads you to this place?
Take heed lest climbing upward from the strand
You come to harm!' My Master answered thus;
'A heavenly lady, of such things aware,

Spake in these words not long ago to us:
"Go ye up yonder, for the gate is there."
And may she speed you on your way to good!'
Rejoined that gracious guard. 'Up to our flight
Advance you then!' We therefore came and stood
At the first stair, which was of marble white,
So clear and burnished, that therein I could
Behold myself, how I appear to sight.
The second was a rough stone, burnt and black
Beyond the darkest purple; through its length
And crosswise it was traversed by a crack.
The third whose mass is rested on their strength
Appeared to me of porphyry, flaming red,
Or like blood spouting from a vein; thereon
God's Angel kept with planted feet his tread,
Sitting upon the threshold's gleaming stone,
Which seemed to me of adamant. My Guide
Led me with my good will up that ascent,
Saying, 'Beg humbly that the bolt may slide!'
And at those hallowed feet devout I bent.
'In mercy open to me!' I implored,
But first I smote me thrice upon my breast.
He on my forehead with his pointed sword
Traced P. seven times, then spake me this behest:
'Wash thou these wounds when thou hast passed the door.

Ashes or dry heaps dug from gravelly earth
  Were of one colour with the robe he wore,
From under which two keys he next drew forth.
  One was of gold, one silver; first he plied
The white, then used the yellow on the gate,
  In such sort as my spirit satisfied;
Then said: 'To none is passable the strait
  When either of these keys be vainly tried,
And in the wards without response it grate.
  One is more precious, one more asketh wise
Counsel and intellect the lock to free,
  Because 'tis this which error's knot unties.
From Peter's hand I hold them. He on me
  Enjoined this rule, that I should rather err
In opening unto penitents, than be
  Slow to unbind, if at my feet they were.'

Then of that pass he pushed the sacred gate,
  Saying: 'Go in; but be ye warned, before
You enter! who looks back returneth straight.'
  And when the hinge-bolts of the holy door,
Which are of strong and sounding metal, rolled
  Round in their sockets, the Tarpeian rock,
When robbed of good Metellus and its gold,
  Rung not so loud nor yielded such a shock.

At the first thunder, as the portal swung
  I looked about, and as I stood intent
Heard *Te Deum laudamus!* clearly sung,
  And the gate's music with the song was blent.
The same impression what I heard gave me
  As on the listener's hearing is begot
When men with organs join their voice, and we
  Now hear the words, and now we hear them not.

END OF THE ANTE-PURGATORIO.

LONDON:
Printed by JOHN STRANGEWAYS, Castle St. Leicester Sq.